

L O U N G E R.

[N^o VI.]

Saturday, March 12. 1785.

A Few mornings ago I was agreeably surpris'd with a very early call from my newly acquired friend *Colonel Caustic*. " 'Tis on a foolish piece of business," said he, " I give you the trouble of this visit. You must know I had an appointment with your friend S—— to go to the play this evening, which a particular affair that has come across him will prevent his keeping; and as a man, after making such an arrangement, feels it irksome to be disappointed, (at least it is so with an old methodical fellow like me), I have taken the liberty of calling, to ask if you will supply his place. I might have had one or two other conductors; but it is only with certain people I chuse to go to such places. Seeing a play, or indeed any thing else, won't do, at my time of life, either alone, or in company not quite to one's mind. 'Tis like drinking a bottle of claret: the liquor is something; but nine tenths of the bargain is in the companion with whom one drinks it." As he spoke this, he gave me his hand with such an air of cordiality—methought we had been acquainted these forty years;—I took it with equal warmth, and assured him, truly, it would give me infinite pleasure to attend him.

When we went to the Theatre in the evening, and while I was reading the box-list, to determine where we should endeavour to find a place, a Lady of the Colonel's acquaintance happening to come in, begged our acceptance of places in her box. We entered accordingly; and I placed my old friend in a situation where I thought he could most conveniently command a view both of the company and of the stage. He had never been in our present house before, and allowed, that in size and convenience it exceeded the old one, tho' he would not grant so much as the Lady and I demanded on that score. " I know," said he, " you are in the right; but one don't easily get rid of first impressions: I can't make you conceive what a Play was to me some fifty years ago, with what feelings I heard the last music begin, nor how my heart beat when it ceased."—" Why, it is very true, Colonel," said the Lady, " one can't retain those feelings always."—" It is something," said I, " to have had them once."—" Why, If I may judge from the little I have seen," replied the Colonel, " your young folks have no time for them now-a-days; their pleasures begin so early, and come so thick."—" 'Tis the way to make the most of their time."—"

" Pardon

"Pardon me, Madam, said he, "I don't think so: 'tis like the difference between your hot-house asparagus and my garden ones; the last have their green and their white; but the first is tasteless from the very top." The Lady had not time to study the allusion; for her company began to come into the box, and continued coming in during all the first act of the Comedy. On one side of Colonel Caustic sat a Lady with a *Lunardi* hat; before him was placed one with a feathered head-dress. Lunardi and the Feathers talked and nodded to one another about an appointment at a milliner's next morning. I sat quiet behind, as is my custom, and betook myself to meditation. The Colonel was not quite so patient: he tried to see the stage, and got a flying vizzy now and then; but in the last attempt he got such a whisk from Miss Feathers on one cheek, and such a poke from the wires of Miss Lunardi on t'other, that he was fain to give up the matter of seeing;—as to hearing, it was out of the question.

"I hope, Colonel, you have been well entertained," said the mistress of the box at the end of the act. "Wonderfully well," said the Colonel.—"That *La-Masb* is a monstrous comical fellow!"—"Oh! as to that, Madam, I know nothing of the matter: in your Ladyship's box one is quite independent of the Players."—He made a sign to me: I opened the box-door, and stood waiting for his coming with me. "Where are you going, Colonel?" said the Lady, as he stepped over the last bench. "To the Play, Madam," said he, bowing, and shutting the door.

For that purpose we went to the pit, where, though it was pretty much crowded, we got ourselves seated in a very central place. There is something in Colonel Caustic's look and appearance, so much not of the form only, but the sentiment of good-breeding, that it is not easy to resist shewing him any civility in one's power. While we stood near the door, a party in the middle of one of the rows beckoned to us, and let us know that we might find room by them; and the Colonel, not without many scruples of complaisance, at last accepted the invitation.

We had not long been in possession of our place before the second act began. We had now an opportunity of hearing the Play, as, though the conversation in the box we had left, which by this time was reinforced by several new performers, was about as loud as that of the Players, we were nearer to the talkers in front than to those behind us. When the act was over I repeated Lady ——'s interrogatory as to the Colonel's entertainment. "I begin," said he, putting his snuff-box to his nose, "to find the inattention of my former box-fellows not quite so unreasonable."—"Our Company of
" this

"this season," said a brother officer who sat near us to Colonel Caustic, "is a very numerous one; they can get up any new Play in a week."—"I am not so much surprised, Sir," replied the Colonel, "at the number of your Players, as I am at the number of the audience."—"Most of the new performers are *drafts* from the English and Irish stage."—"From the *awkward divisions* of them I presume."—"You are a very critic, Sir," returned the officer; "but the house has been as full as you see it every night these three weeks."—"I can easily believe it," said the Colonel.

As the Play went on, the Colonel was asked his opinion of it by this gentleman and one or two more of his neighbours. He was shy of venturing his judgment on the piece; they were kind enough to direct him how to form one. "This is a very favourite Comedy, Sir, and has had a great run at Drury-Lane."—"Why, gentlemen," said he, "I have no doubt of the Comedy being an excellent Comedy, since you tell me so; and to be sure those gentlemen and ladies who make up the *dramatis persone* of it say a number of good things, some of them not the worse for having been said last century by *Joe Miller*; but I am often at a loss to know what they would be at, and wish for a little of my old friend *Bayes's* insinuation to direct me."—"You mean, Sir, that the plot is involved."—"Pardon me, Sir," not at all; "'tis a perfectly clear plot, as clear as the sun in the cucumber," as *Antho* in *Venice Preserved* says. The hero and heroine are to be married, and they are at a loss how to get it put off till the fifth act."—"You will see, Sir, how the last scene will wind it up."—"Oh! I have no doubt, Sir, that it will end at the dropping of the curtain."

Before the dropping of the curtain, however, it was not easy to attend to that winding up of the plot which was promised us. Between gentlemen coming into the house from dinner parties, and ladies going out of it to evening ones, the disorder in the boxes, and the calling to order in the pit, the business of the Comedy was rather supposed than followed, and the actors themselves seemed inclined to slur it a little, being too well bred not to perceive that they interrupted the arrangements of some of the genteel part of their audience.

When the curtain was down, I saw Colonel Caustic throw his eye round the house with a look which I knew had nothing to do with the Comedy. After a silence of two or three minutes, in which I did not chuse to interrupt him, "Amidst the various calculations of lives," said he, "is there any table for the life of a *Beauty*?"—"I believe not," said I, smiling; "there is a fragility in that, which neither *Price* nor *Masfres* ever thought of applying figures to."

'Tis

" 'Tis a sort of mortality," continued the Colonel, " which, at such
 " a time as this, at the ending of some public entertainment, I have
 " often thought on with a very melancholy feeling. An old Bache-
 " lor like me, who has no girls of his own, except he is a very pec-
 " vish fellow, which I hope I am not, looks on every one of
 " these young creatures in some measure as a daughter; and when
 " I think how many children of that sort I have lost—for there are
 " a thousand ways of a Beauty's dying—it almost brings tears into
 " my eyes. Then they are so spoiled while they do live. Here I
 " am as splenetic as before I was melancholy. Those flower-beds
 " we see, so fair to look on,—What useless weeds are suffered to
 " grow up with them!—" I do not think, Colonel, that the mere
 " flower part is left uncultivated."—" Why, even as to that, 'tis
 " artificially forced before its time. A woman has a character even
 " as a Beauty. A Beauty, a toast, a fine woman, merely considered
 " as such, has a sort of professional character, which it requires some
 " sense and accomplishments to maintain. Now-a-days, there are
 " so many irregulars who practise at fifteen, without a single re-
 " quisite except mere outside!—If we go a little farther, and confi-
 " der a woman as something more than a Beauty; when we regard
 " the sex as that gentle but irresistible power that should mould the
 " world to a finer form; that should teach benignity to wisdom,
 " to virtue grace, humanity to valour; when we look on them in
 " less eminent, but not less useful points of view, as those *dii penates*,
 " those household deities, from whom man is to find comfort and
 " protection, who are to smooth the ruggedness of his labours,
 " the irksomeness and cares of business; who are to blunt the sting
 " of his sorrows and the bitterness of his disappointments!—You
 " think me a fool for declaiming thus."—" No, upon my soul, don't
 " I; I hope you think better of me than to suppose so."—" But I
 " may come down from my declamation. Yonder are a set, flutter-
 " ing in that box there,—young to be sure, but they will never be
 " older, except in wrinkles—I don't suppose they have an idea in
 " their heads beyond the colour of a ribbon, the placing of a fea-
 " ther, or the step of a cotillon!—And yet they may get husbands."
 "—" If it please God," said I,—“ And be the mothers of the next
 " generation,”—" 'Tis to be hoped.”—" Well, well, old Caustic
 " will be in his grave by that time.”

There was what Shakespeare calls " a humorous sadness" in the
 thought, at which I did not well know whether to smile or be sor-
 rowful. But on the whole, it was one I did not choose to press too
 close on. I feel that I begin to love this old man exceedingly; and
 having acquired him late, I hope I shall not lose him soon.